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ABSTRACT

Androgyny consists of the integration of relatively large numbers of both feminine and masculine sex-stereotyped characteristics. The androgynous person is viewed as a more adaptable individual. Several researchers have studied this "androgyny-equals-adaptability" hypothesis set forth by Bem (1974). Examination of this data yields a phenomenon labeled "masculine supremacy effect": masculine characteristics are related, particularly in correlational studies using pencil-and-paper measures, to adaptability, adjustment, and self-esteem within either gender. Feminine characteristics do not seem to be strongly related to these same variables. There are several potential explanations for the "masculine supremacy effect." Recommendations for future research in androgyny include: (1) an examination of factorial commonalities in prominently used scales; (2) a conceptualization of androgyny to permit its assessment on an interval scale; (3) research on the relationships between androgyny and intelligence; (4) research on the development of androgyny; (5) an examination of negatively valued traits; and (6) the development of an effective teaching approach to androgyny. (Author/NRB)

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Thoughts on Androgyny for the Counseling Psychologist

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Thoughts on Androgyny for the Counseling Psychologist

This paper has been prepared as one component of an American Psychological Association Convention symposium entitled "Psychological Androgyny in Action: Problems in Assessment and Implementation." It is the purpose of this paper to communicate several relevant thoughts that have been developed through a careful reading of the existing androgyny literature. Since the authors are counseling psychologists, the paper certainly reflects a counseling perspective. As appropriate, specific counseling implications have been explored.

Definition of Androgyny

Recent formulations of sex roles (Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975; Berzins, Welling & Wetter, 1975) have relied upon the assumption of an orthogonal, two-dimensional model of masculinity-femininity. Persons of either gender can be high or low on each dimension. An individual is considered sex-typed to the extent that sex-stereotyped characteristics of one variety are selected to the exclusion of sex-stereotyped descriptions of the other variety. Androgyny consists of the endorcement of relatively large numbers of both feminine and masculine sex-stereotyped characteristics.

Historical Context of Androgyny

Within primitive societies, there existed a need for role

differentiation along sex lines to divide appropriately and efficiently the labors of living. Since strength, agility, and aggression were necessary skills for hunting and protection, these same skills became attributes of the sex trained to undertake hunting and fighting, usually the men. Since the expressive skills of understanding and nurturance seemed necessary for childrearing, these skills were generally encouraged in women. A child in a primitive society grew up knowing his/her expected role. The child also knew that performance of the expected role was a meaningful and recognized manner of viable participation in the society as a whole.

We nc longer live in a primitive society! Despite dramatic changes in our patterns of everyday life, however, the original, primitive sex-roles manage to remain with us. The consequences of these expectations of behavior are felt by both men and women:

> For the contemporary male, the price [of sex-typing] is great, both physically and psychically: higher mortality, more suicides, greater incidence of fatal diseases (cardiovascular, cirrhosis of the liver, pneumonia, tuberculosis, etc.), more migraines, ulcers, hypertension, alcoholism, less tolerance for stress, and more pervasive interpersonal isolation than women. (Skovholt, 1978, p. 11)
>
> [The feminist movement] derives from the urgent need of women to break the bonds which hamper their development

> and their meaningful participation in society. Today's woman has been socialized to live in a world that no longer exists, to give primacy to roles that have become psychologically and socially constricting and whose duration is highly uncertain, to acquire behavior styles that ill fit the responsibilities she is likely to have to carry. (Westervelt, 1973, p. 22)

From either a logical or a political standpoint, one must conclude that sex roles, as they are presently perceived, are confining for both men and women. Psychological androgyny allows a release from the binds inherent in traditional sex-typing. The series of studies reported by Bem (1974, 1975) have raised important issues relative to adaptability within sex-roles. Traditionally masculine or feminine individuals may well not be as psychologically healthy as an androgynous individual who identifies with both masculine and feminine characteristics. This androgynous person, then, may comfortably and effectively perform a behavior specific to a given need. The behavior selected is drawn from a larger domain of skills that includes both "masculine" and "feminine" social characteristics. The major implication of Bem's concept of sex-roles is that the behavioral flexibility of the androgynous person creates a healthier and more adaptable individual. Within a society as complex and as changeable as our own, such adaptability is seen as a highly valued attribute.

Empirical Support for Androgyny

Bem's original set of behavioral tests of the "androgyny-equals-adaptability" hypothesis contiues to be the best supporting evidence available. Bem's research (Bem, 1975; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna & Watson, 1976) has demonstrated that androgynous persons are flexible in their social behavior and that they do vary their reactions according to situational demands rather than according to sex-role stereotypes. Androgynous men, then, are more likely to pet a kitten or comfort a baby than traditional males, and androgynous women behave more independently than sex-typed females. Contrary to expectations, however, feminine-typed women were not consistently more expressive, nurturant, or affectionate in situations designed to evoke these responses relative to other sex-role categories (Bem, 1975; Bem et al., 1976).

Kelly, O'Brien, Hosford, and Kinsinger (1976) reported a behavioral test of differences in assertion between androgynous and sex-typed individuals. Undifferentiated individuals (low in both masculine and feminine characteristics) were found to be most inept at assertion while androgynous individuals were most effective. Sex-typed individuals fell between the two extremes.

Unfortunately, the Bem studies and the Kelly et al. investigation are the only direct empirical tests to validate the androgyny concept through behavioral referents. Other studies (e.g., Bem, 1977; Jones, Chernovetz & Hansson, 1978) have addressed pencil-and-paper correlates of androgyny and found very little

correspondence between the theory of the "adaptable, self-confident, internally motivated" androgen and the data generated. Bem (1977) found significant sex-role effects only for two variables: self-esteem (feminine and undifferentiated subjects lower than androgynous and masculine subjects) and attitudes towards women (only in men: masculine men slightly more conservative than other categories). The other measures employed, but not found significant, included internal-external locus of control, a Machiavellianism scale, a self-disclosure measure, and an attitudes toward problem-solving scale.

Jones et al. (1978), after a relatively exhaustive series of correlational tests relating sex-role to pencil-and-paper measures varying from gender identification to neurosis to confidence in one's ability to sexual maturity (some 27 variables in all), concluded that:

> The androgyny equals adaptability hypothesis seems not to hold for males. In most instances androgynous males scored in the less adaptive direction than masculine males, and frequently these differences were significant. In no case were androgynous males found to be significantly more adaptive, flexible, or competent than masculine males. (p. 310)

Further, in regard to the women in the sample, Jones et al. (1978) determined that "the more masculine in orientation, the more adaptive, competent, and secure the female subject was (p. 310)."

Thus, the notion that androgynous subjects, by virtue of a

more extensive behavioral repertoire, would demonstrate the most desirable pattern of scores across this multitude of pencil-and-paper measures was simply not supported. In fact, this hypothesis was contradicted (particularly in the Jones et al. data) by indications that sex-typed males and cross sex-typed females were demonstrating the most flexible and competent pattern of responses.

The pencil-and-paper instruments do not lend support to the androgyny concept. Masculinity's presence alone seems related to higher self-esteem (Bem, 1977), to fewer adjustment problems, to greater adaptability, and to sexual maturity (Jones et al., 1978). Essentially, the empirical data are introducing what might be called the "masculine supremacy effect" in creating the "good things" in life.

Hypotheses on the "Masculine Supremacy" Phenomenon

First of all, it is important to remember that those behavioral studies that have been completed to date (Bem, 1975; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem et al., 1976; Kelly et al., 1976) are generally very supportive of the conceptual definition of androgyny. The only exceptional finding, however, indicated that masculine women were more nurturant with kittens than were feminine women. This one exception to the androgynous theoretical expectation is, however, consistent with the "masculine supremacy" findings: It may be that the assertive behaviors characterized as masculine are sometimes necessary precursors which allow the woman to make an intial expressive approach to a situation. In other words, the full implementation

of the skills valued for women may require masculine characteristics! The feminine sex-typed woman may ask herself: "Who will ever know how empathic and understanding a woman I can be if I'm too reticent to talk to anyone?"

What might cause the apparent "masculine supremacy" effect?

1. Obviously, the first alternative is that, in our society, the masculine characteristics (e.g., assertive, ambitious, dominant, forceful) are simply those which are socially valued. Thus, a person who possesses such skills is at an advantage in adapting to and dealing with everyday life situations. The feminine characteristics are, perhaps, of a relatively lower value. Support for such a hypothesis is found in Jones et al.'s (1978) finding that feminine subjects, independent of gender, would prefer to become more masculine if that was possible. A similar tendency was <u>not</u> found among masculine subjects.

2. Since this "masculine supremacy" effect is most evident within pencil-and-paper instruments, it may be an artifact of the measurement. What Mischel (1970) has indicated with regard to sex differences may also apply to sex-type differences:

> Sex differences on questionnaires thus may reflect differences between the sexes in their self-reports that may or may not be closely related to other indices of their nontest behavior. For example, the sexes may give different self-reports in part because the <u>admission</u> of particular attributes or behaviors may have different value and may lead to

> different consequences as a function of the individual's sex. . . . Sex differences thus may exist on self-reports where there are none in nontest behavior, and vice versa. (p. 13)

As Kelly and Worell (1977) point out by way of example: "Feminine-typed women may endorse . . . characteristics that they feel they ought to exhibit in order to be adequate females, but in reality these are not their dominant response dispositions." (p. 1112)

Along somewhat similar lines, one might argue the possibility of biased results due to "method variance" in assessment based upon totally self-report measures (Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

3. Perhaps the "masculine supremacy" effect is nothing more than an example of a basic learning principle: Immediate small reinforcements more powerfully influence behavior than do larger, but delayed, rewards. Although the long term "rewards" of a sex-role choice favor femininity (e.g., longer life, lesser incidence of health problems), the short term reinforcement falls heavily on the side of masculinity (rewards include increased independence, more powerful jobs, and greater influence). On this basis alone, the self-esteem and mental health of those with masculine characteristics may be higher than non-masculine individuals.

Recommendations for Future Work on Androgyny

Although it is not the intention of this paper to review all

of the androgyny literature, several specific recommendations have been drawn based upon the earlier findings.

1. The four scales that are prominently employed to measure androgyny (Bem, 1974; Spence et al., 1975; Berzins et al., 1975; Heilbrun, 1976) should be examined concurrently to determine factorial commonalities. This undertaking has been initiated by Wilson (1979) as part of the symposium for which the present paper has been prepared. Since each test is founded on slightly different assumptions, the cross-validation attempt is essential to understanding the variety of androgyny research studies.

2. Androgyny could be conceptualized in a manner that might allow for its assessment on an interval scale rather than as simply a category. One possibility along these lines might involve the presently available scales. For example, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) could be administered to a group of subjects. Both masculinity and femininity scales could be scored, and each subject could be assigned two standard scores (z scores): one for each scale. The two standard scores, now being measured on the same metric, could be averaged to give the relative level of androgyny on an interval scale. For example, the high scorer in both masculinity and femininity may score near +1.00 on the combined androgyny score. The undifferentiated respondent might well score close to -1.00. Sex-typed individuals (either masculine or feminine sex-typed individuals) would fall nearer to zero on the combined measure. Without the truncation necessarily involved in categorization, this interval scale measurement of

androgyny might allow for the identification of significant correlations that otherwise might be missed. Also, the method would retain many of the virtues of the present approach since mean (not median as is now common) splits could be accomplished at a glance: those below the mean would have negative standard scores while those above would have positive scores.

3. Research investigating the relationships between androgyny and intelligence should be undertaken. Many indices of personality are correlated substantially with intelligence, and, as Mischel (1970) has indicated, intelligence has an important contribution in sex-role attitudes and preferences. Were the correlations between I.Q. and sex-role very high, the validity of the sex-role measures would be called into question. For instance, a "less intelligent" subject may, hypothetically, be less aware of the negative social desirability of acknowledging the presence of an opposite-sex trait. By agreeing to such a characteristic on the test, this subject may be more likely to be scored as androgynous than would ideally be appropriate. Of course, other, equally as persuasive, arguments concerning potential I.Q. and sex-role relationships could easily be made.

4. Research needs to be extended in the direction of explaining the development of androgyny. The researchable questions in this area are probably limitless, but they certainly include the following two issues: (a) Does one generally become androgynous at an early age or can such skills develop at a much later time? (b) Are the developmental hassles of an androgynous

person more or less difficult than those of a sex-typed person? (For example, the junior high school boy who is expressive and understanding may be socially excluded from his peer group.)

5. As Wiggins and Holzmuller (1978) have indicated, psychological androgyny, although not presently measured in this manner, may very well be associated with certain less desirable traits as well as with the desirable traits upon which the scales are now based. Kelly and Worell (1977) have raised this same issue in their review of the literature: essentially, they asked "how negatively valued traits may affect sex-role categories and their correlates (p.1106)?" This question has yet to be addressed.

6. As the Bellucci (1979) paper in this symposium has indicated, the teaching of androgyny to someone else is, at best, a very complex problem. First of all, we cannot "see" androgyny in any given situation. Androgyny is a set of available behaviors or characteristics from which a person may choose to handle a given situation. To see a person respond to one situation gives us no idea as to the extent of that person's available choices. In essence, a teaching approach to androgyny would first need to involve assessment of the levels of skill in the femininity and masculinity areas. This assessment step, alone, may be monumental! Assuming that assessment is accomplishable, the next step would be to teach, probably through modeling, role-playing, and feedback, each of the deficit skills. Finally, a cognitive system for "appropriately" making the decision on the implementation of a feminine- or masculine-typed skill would need to be developed and implemented.

Were such a teaching strategy employed, would the learner be more adaptive interpersonally? This, of course, is open to empirical test. There are no more likely investigators of this question than counseling psychologists! That we must attempt to encourage more behavioral flexibility in clients and sex-role flexibility (particularly for feminine types) seems to be relatively clear.

Conclusion

Psychological androgyny developed out of a political view of sex-roles. Traditional women were restricted by a lack of assertion and self-reliance, skills inherently part of a masculine sex-role. There are presently indications that masculinity and its associated characteristics are the primary correlates with self-esteem and are related to some extent with other adaptive and healthy behaviors. Least such data be interpreted as evidence of the lack of importance of feminine characteristics, it is crucial to state that our society and our world need cooperative interpersonal styles. Emotional attachments and interdependencies are needed. These feminine-typed characteristics must be encouraged in masculine-typed individuals. Despite research evidence indicating that the masculinity dimensions are more highly valued, as counseling psychologists, we can certainly perceive the long term values of the feminine characteristics. The world will require leaders during the increasingly tense days ahead who can listen to and understand emotions as well as logic.

Feminine skills may well be tempered by masculine counterparts, but to think of the world without androgynous leaders (obviously, of either gender) is truly frightening!

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